

SPACE NOW

A SPACE FOR ALL SOCIETY INITIATIVE

The Silent
Spiritual Masters

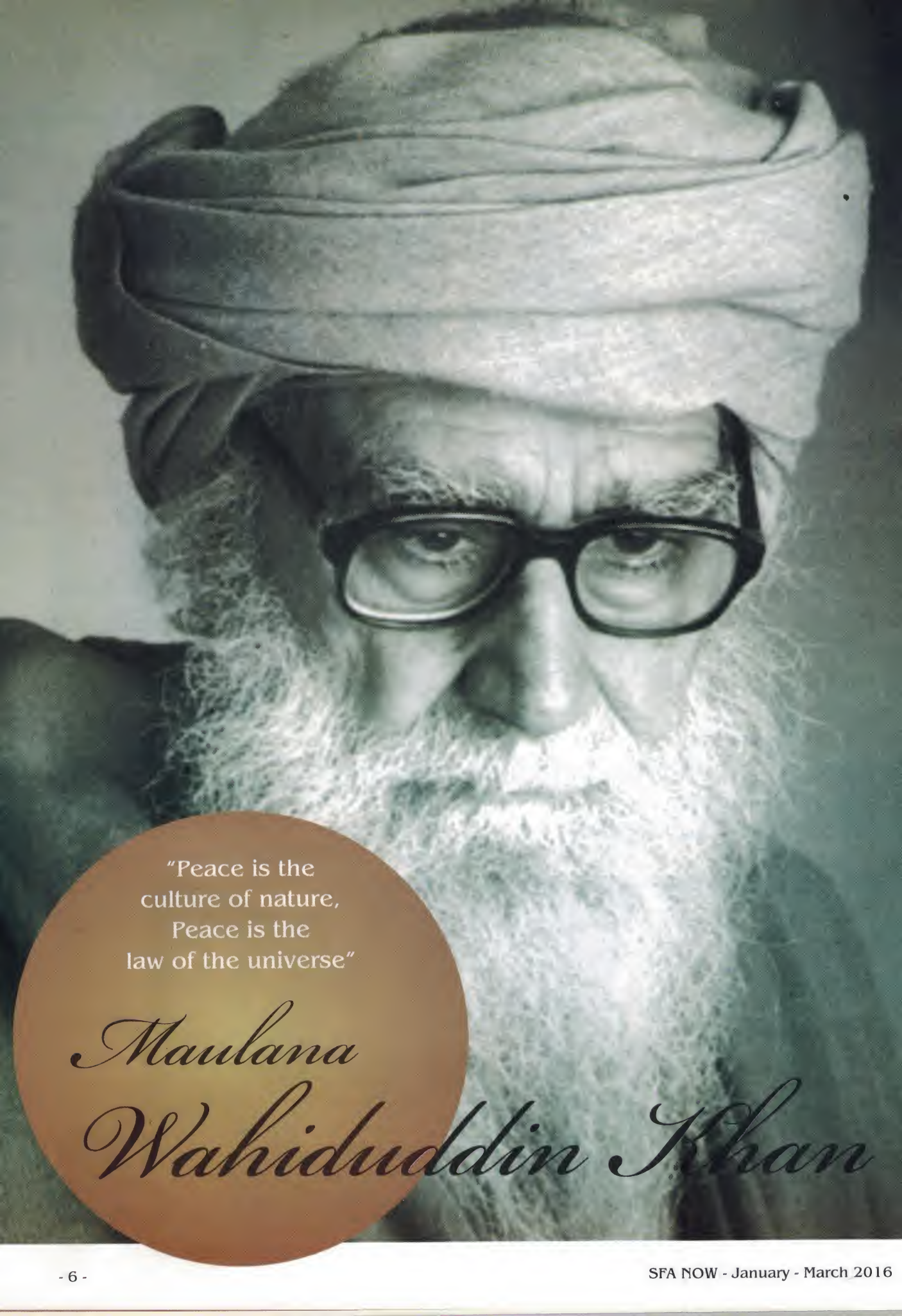
Peace is the law of Universe
- Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Death
Taught Me Life

Balancing
The Trinity

in search of
harmony

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A black and white portrait of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, an elderly man with a long white beard and glasses, wearing a turban. The portrait is the background of the page.

"Peace is the
culture of nature,
Peace is the
law of the universe"

*Maulana
Wahiduddin Khan*

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan talks about his books, religious education and explains how Islam is the religion of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood.

- by Bhawna Malik

Dressed in sea green khadi kurta, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan oozes pious energy that defies all age barriers, just back after offering his afternoon Namaz during his Roza, he settles down gently along with his daughter Farida Khanum and his granddaughter Sadia to discuss various issues concerning Islam and its ideology. The trio work tirelessly to propagate the message of peace through their organisation CPS International, 'Centre for Peace and Spirituality', guided by the motto 'change yourself through spirituality'.

I begin informally by asking, how can we decide on spirituality when it is obscured by confusion and debate – either we can be spiritual or religious or can we be both?

He ponders for a while and says that "Religion is a part of spirituality. When you understand the unity in religion and spirituality then you witness that there is unity in all the religions. Culture is not a part of religion, it's a geographical and social phenomena. We can have cultural differences not spiritual as all scriptures talk of eternal and universal values of love, peace, compassion and universal brotherhood".

But all people have a different set of values, how can they be tackled in a pluralistic society?

"Values are self discovered. They come from one's own experience. The world is full of differences and would remain so; the problem comes when each individual exercises his own freedom. God has given each individual a freedom to act. Managing and living with these differences in a healthy way is creativity". He further adds.

After a pause he lovingly asks his granddaughter, "Kyon Sadia Theek Hai Na?" (Is it correct Sadia?) and then he continues and explains the practical aspects of spirituality.

"Creativity means positivity. Man must engage in positive engineering of the mind. Negativity breeds hatred and pride, so opt for mind based

spirituality not heart based. Consider problems as opportunities for growth. Think rationally, don't react to provocation rather give a contemplative response. Quran encourages us to develop independent and rational thinking".

Is contemplation same as meditation – thoughtless state or chanting as is common in other religions? I ask. He looks at me for a while and answers.

"I have a different approach to this. Spirituality in Islam is based on contemplation. Quran has many verses that encourage thinking – not what to think but how to think. So introspect mercilessly. The quest for truth starts this intellectual journey".

He quotes Quran's perspective on contemplation and asks Sadia to translate it in English for me.

The Quran says, "There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding: Who remember God while standing, sitting and (lying) on all sides, and who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying,

'Lord, you have not created all this without purpose' (3:190-91)

A prolific writer and scholar, Maulana's two books, 'God Arises' and 'Islam and Modern Challenges' were well received world over and 'God Arises' has been translated in Arabic, Malay, Turkish, Hindi, Malayalam and Sindhi. Some of his books are even part of university curriculum.

Experiment and experience is what Maulana Wahiduddin believes in. Author of 200 books and innumerable articles, Maulana Wahiduddin received his religious schooling in Madrasatul Islahi, in Sarai Mir, near Azamgarh in 1938. Not satisfied with his Madrassa education, he started on his own and read Quran deeply and other religious philosophies too. His thirst for knowledge made him read other subjects like science, philosophy and Psychology. A prolific writer and scholar, Maulana's two books 'God Arises' and 'Islam and Modern Challenges' were well received world over and 'God Arises' has been translated in Arabic, Malay, Turkish, Hindi, Malayalam and Sindhi, some of his books are even part of university curriculum.



Despite his Roza, there is no hint of weakness in his voice and our conversation shifts to relevance of Roza and how he can manage it at the age of 90 plus.

He smiles and replies that "God is the creator of food and water, we are only takers of this not creators. Hence observing a Roza is a gesture of gratitude to God for these bounties and remembering the giver. Roza also teaches us to understand the thirst and hunger of others and here Islam has a social relevance too".

Is charity associated with Roza? I question.

"Everyone must give in Charity as Prophet Mohammad says, "Everyday, when the sun rises, every joint of the human body has its act of charity to perform", to make a just settlement between two men is an act of charity. So is the helping of a man on to his mount, or the unloading of his baggage, or just saying a kind word. Every obstacle removed from another's path is an act of charity".

Fascinated by his enthusiasm and simplicity, my next question makes him ponder as I enquire does he always wear khadi. Is it a sign of austerity?

"I was inspired by my brother Maulana Iqbal

Ahmad, who was a religious scholar and a Gandhian. My brother always wore khadi so I followed him in that" He shares. He told me that the Gandhi's Non Violence had its roots in the ideology of peace that are mentioned in Quran.

Known for his Gandhian views and efforts for establishing peace, Maulana Wahiduddin was termed as 'Islam's Spiritual Ambassador to the World' in the book 'The 500 most influential muslims of 2009'. Winner of Padma Bhushan award in 2000, 'Demiurgus Peace International Award' under the patronage of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavna Award', 'National Citizen Award', he has shared the dais with Mother Teresa and Dalai Lama. In 2015 he was conferred with the 'Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Ibn Ali Peace Award'. One cannot ignore his book 'The Prophet of Peace'. What made him write book on this theme? I quiz him.

"This book contains the essence of Islam – peace. There are misconceptions and misrepresentations as regards the ideology of Islam, and this book is the result of my life long study." He explains.

Presently Islam is associated with jihad and

terrorism, how can one associate peace with it? I ask. "Peace is one of the attributes of God. We say As-Salam, i.e. 'The source of peace', meaning thereby that God is the epitome of peace. Prophet Mohammad was the greatest peace activist in history as he stated in Quran –

"Reconciliation is the best" (4: I 28)

And he further quotes:

"God grants to peace what he does not grant to violence" Muslim ibn – Hajjaj, Book of Virtue, Ch.23, Hadith No.2593.

But there is a global demand to bring social justice first and then peace would be established because without social justice how can one even think about peace? Maulana Wahiduddin responds immediately and clarifies.

"Don't bracket peace and justice together. Peace opens the doors for justice, first bring peace and justice will automatically follow as peace brings opportunities for solutions that bring about justice".

But, how would masses know when Jihadis quote from Quran and justify their political extremism, fanaticism and fundamentalism?

Maulana Sahib contemplates for a while and asks Sadia again to translate the verses from Quran in English for me. She shares a verse which says –

"People of the Book. Do not go to extremes in your religion." (4.171)

"The misunderstanding comes not from scripture but the inability of the Muslims to face the new world, new thoughts, technology, hence, they feel threatened", he explains.

Contemplation is another name for Maulana sahib, as he reflects deeply before answering my queries. He begins to explain the meaning of true Jihad. " Jihad, in its literal sense means ' to struggle – striving to one's utmost to further a worthy cause'. Prophet Mohammad once observed that,

"A mujahid is one who struggles with his own self, so that he may surrender to God."

"Islamic Jihad is thus a positive and continuous action or process. It has three large spheres" He further explains.

'Jihad an Nafs': struggle to control one's negative emotions and desires.

'Jihad-e Dawah: struggle to convey the message of God to all humankind making every effort required inspired by compassion and concern for all.

'Jihad-e A'ada: struggle to preserve true religion under all circumstances.

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Time flies when interacting with Maulana sahib, who is a repository of knowledge but it's time to take his leave and before leaving I ask him about the concept of 'Life Skills' that has generated the interest of people, What are essential life skills according to him?

"People are running after materialism and somewhere down the line they realise its futility, they cannot face challenges in life because they have not tapped into their inner reserves – peace, love, compassion, honesty. These are the actual skills that a person needs to overcome the challenges" He says on the parting note.

Maulana Sahib gets ready to meet other visitors and as for me I return with food for the mind – books gifted by Maulana Sahib and food for the soul – Quran, translated in English for me to read and contemplate.

Maulana sahib is not a peace activist rather 'Peace Personified'.



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